



News Release

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New Recess Guidelines for Bad Air Days

Officials Update Air Quality Guidance

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Things are easier today for school leaders and parents who want to keep children safe on bad air days. The Utah Department of Health (UDOH), the Utah Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and other community partners have updated air quality guidelines for recess during inversions.

“As a mother, I don’t want to send my children out to play when it isn’t healthy for them,” said Cherise Udell, a mother in Salt Lake School District. “This guidance is important because it lets me know schools are aware of the air quality and that they are trying their best to protect kids.”

The guidance recommends that when pollutants known as particulate matter (PM 2.5) measure 35.5–55.4, micrograms per cubic meter of air (ug/m^3), sensitive students should avoid outdoor activities. Sensitive students may include those with poorly controlled asthma, cystic fibrosis, chronic lung disease, congenital heart disease, or compromised immune systems. For PM 2.5 readings between 55.5–90 ug/m^3 , outdoor activities should be restricted for any student experiencing respiratory symptoms like coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, and chest tightness. When the PM 2.5 level is above 90 ug/m^3 , all children should be kept inside for physical activity.

“The need for air quality guidance came to our attention in 2004 when we began to realize there was no coordinated source of information for Utah schools to address

outdoor air pollution in relation to school activities,” said Dr. George Delavan, Director of the UDOH Division of Community and Family Health Services. At that time, UDOH, along with DEQ, developed guidance that gave students, parents, and schools a Web site where they could find information on current pollutant levels to help make decisions on outside activities.

“Changes were made to the guidance based on new science and experience,” says DEQ Toxicologist Steve Packham, Ph.D. The new guidance offers three improvements:

1. It aligns with recommendations from the new Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Air Standard for PM2.5;
2. It allows greater flexibility in allowing healthy students to benefit from outdoor exercise; and
3. It provides a conservative level of protection when outdoor activities are not recommended for all students.

The air quality guidance is not a law, mandate or policy, but was developed as a strategy for school districts to use when deciding whether to keep students inside or outside on poor air quality days.

For more information on the guidance visit <http://health.utah.gov/asthma/> or <http://www.airquality.utah.gov/>

For more information on how to improve air quality visit www.cleanair.utah.gov or <http://www.idlefree.utah.gov/>.

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